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HOMEMAKERS' CHAT

WEDNESDAY, MAY 10, 1939

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

SUBJECT: "IRON NEWS:" Information from the Office of Experiment Stations, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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Iron was the first of the minerals in food to have the attention of nutrition scientists. Long before they understood the body's need for such minerals as calcium and phosphorus, they had discovered the relation between iron-rich food and healthy red blood. For many years they've understood that anyone living on a diet low in iron would eventually become pale and enemic. Yet there's still much to learn about iron that may help us have better diets and better health. Scientists have only found out recently that the iron a food contains may not all be in the form the body can use. So once more they're testing foods for iron in the laboratories--testing to find out how much of the iron is available.

The foods now listed as most helpful in building red blood are: eggs; liver, heart and kidney; other lean meat; shellfish; whole-grain cereals; green and yellow vegetables; potatoes (if you eat as much as a whole potato a day); beans and peas; fruit, fresh and dried; molasses and sorghum sirup.

Perhaps the most significant conclusion as a result of recent research is that women and children should come first in iron but don't usually. That is, women and children need more iron than men, yet generally have less in their diets. Most women don't eat as much as men--certainly not as much meat. But fortunately they eat more fruits, vegetables and eggs, and the iron in these foods is all in a form the body can use.

Until just lately the scientists have believed that women's blood just naturally was paler than men's and that they needed less iron in their food.



Tests had showed that men's blood averaged 10 percent higher than women's in red coloring. So they concluded that this was the normal condition. But recently in the nutrition laboratory of the Arizona Experiment Station Dr. Smith in experimenting with rats found that female rats needed more iron than male rats. And other scientists, testing people, gave large amounts of iron to both men and women whose blood was considered normal. The men made no use of this extra iron. But the women did--and felt better for it. Moreover, physicians have reported that a large number of girls and young women--high school and college girls and young mothers--eating average meals have low chronic anemia and the lack of vitality that goes with it. There's quite a difference between passable health and buoyant health. Probably most of the blood tests made in the past were on women who were in just passable health.

Nutrition scientists don't know exactly how much iron women up to middle age should have to keep in buoyant health. To be on the safe side they now say you need a good assortment of iron-rich foods every day. Every day a woman needs an egg, whole-grain cereal and whole-wheat bread; meat or fish; some dried fruit like prunes, apricots, raisins and dates; fresh fruit, a potato, and 2 yellow or green vegetables. Then, once a week, you should have a generous serving of liver, kidney or heart because these meats are especially valuable as red blood builders.

You'll notice that these foods belong to every day's diet. You can't build up on your iron every now and then, because the body can't store much of it, and because iron occurs only in traces in food.

Once upon a time mothers dosed their pale anemic children with sulphur and molasses in springtime or gave them rusty water to drink. The modern mother doesn't have to resort to such dosing because she plans meals for her children that prevent anemia. The modern baby at 6 months of age not only gets egg yolk and fruit juice but also cereal-gruel and ground liver or scraped beef. A baby



kept too long on a diet of milk alone shows signs of anemia at 6 months-- or earlier, if its mother had a diet low in iron.

But it's easier to keep a baby supplied with iron than a little child with his own ideas of what he wants to eat. So mothers of preschool children have a serious responsibility for planning meals with plenty of iron-rich foods, and also teaching children to like these foods. To be sure a young child gets enough iron, a mother should give him the same iron-rich foods she herself needs but in smaller servings.

With a good start in iron in early life, the iron problem is pretty well taken care of until adolescence if family meals are good. However, tests of 5 thousand rural school children in one State showed that 2 thousand were definitely anemic. This was largely because family meals ran so low in iron-rich foods. And further, what vegetables these families had were grown on soil poor in iron. When these anemic children received more iron, they recovered from their pallor, chronic fatigue and loss of appetite.

Girls from 11 to 16 or even older very often suffer from lack of iron. These young girls actually need about as much iron as grown women. But boys can get along nicely on less.

So there's the latest picture of iron needs at different ages. From it you can see that farm families have the advantage as far as iron is concerned. By planning and producing their own foods, they can provide themselves with plenty of eggs; meat; garden vegetables; fresh, canned and dried fruit; and also whole grain cereals. It's families that make the mistake of living largely on starches and sugars and fats that miss out on iron.

